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# Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 01189 101115 Z

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 RSR-01 RSC-01 /015 W
---------- 023949
R 101001 Z MAY 73
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO USIA WASHDC
USIA WASHDC
SECSTATE WASHDC 9493

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 1189

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CE
SUBJ: POWER STRUGGLE IN TIMES NEWSPAPER GROUP

JOINT USIS/ EMBASSY MESSAGE

1. STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF TIMES GROUP OF NEWSPAPERS, MOST VOCIFEROUS CRITIC OF GSL, BECAME PUBLIC MAY 6 WITH PUBLICATION IN " THE TIMES WEEKENDER" OF LETTER FROM TIMES BRANCH OF JOURN-ALISTS' UNION TO NEWLY APPOINTED DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE FIRM, P. A. EDIRIWEERA, UNDER FRONT PAGE BANNER HEADLINES " IT' S TIME TO RESUCE THE " TIMES'; STARTLING REVELATIONS BY SRI LANKA JOURNALISTS' UNION; SHARE MACHINATIONS BY POWER BLOC."

2. BATTLE LINES HAVE STOCKHOLDER AND FORMER DIRECTOR, N. S. O. MENDIS, CURRENT DIRECTOR, S. VISVANATHAN, AND EDITOR- IN- CHIEF ( UNTIL LAST WEEK), R. MICHAEL, AGAINST BOARD CHAIRMAN, DONALD RANAWEERA, AND WHAT HAS BEEN MAJORITY OF BOARD OF DIR-ECTORS. REPORTS INDICATE MENDIS GROUP HAS ACQUIRED MAJORITY SHARES AND PLANS TO TAKE OVER CONTROL.

3. COUNTERATTACK BEGAN LAST WEEK WITH APPOINTMENT OF EDIRIWEERA AS DEPCHAIRMAN. NEXT, " DAILY MIRROR" ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD CEASE TO CARRY EDITORIALS, THUS MUZZLING EDITOR-IN- CHIEF MICHAEL. FRIDAY, EDIRIWEERA ASSUMED POSITION OF EDITOR-IN- CHIEF, PRESUMABLY LEAVING MICHAEL WITH EDITORSHIP OF " DAILY MIRROR" ONLY.

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4. JOURNALISTS' UNION LETTER ALLEGES PROVIDENT FUND IRREG-
ULARITIES AND INCOMPENTENT MANAGEMENT BY VISVANATHAN, UNJUST
EDITORIAL ATTACKS ON " PROGRESSIVE AND SOCIALISTIC MEASURES
OF THE PEOPLE' S GOVERNMENT" AND PRIME MINISTER BY MICHAEL,
AND UNETHICAL MEANS USED TO GAIN CONTROL OF SHARES BY MENDIS.
IT THREATENS TO " PLACE THESE FACTS" BEFORE PRIME MINISTER IF
CURRENT MANAGEMENT UNABLE TO RESOLVE PROBLEM.

5. ACCORDING TO PRESS, MENDIS GROUP CALLED DIRECTORS'
MEETING MAY 9, WITHOUT GIVING NOTICE TO RANAWEERA GROUP, AND
ELECTED THREE OF THEIR OWN PEOPLE TO BOARD. RANAWEERA AND
EDIRIWEERA IMMEDIATELY SECURED TEMPORARY COURT INJUCTION
DECLARING THE ACTION VOID.

6. COMMENT: ULTIMATE OUTCOME UNCERTAIN. RANAWEERA AND
EDIRIWEERA MAY BE VOTED OUT AT SPECIAL STOCKHOLDERS' MEETING
EXPECTED SHORTLY. HOWEVER, THERE IS LIKELIHOOD OF LABOR
TROUBLE AND CLOSE- DOWN OF PAPERS IF THAT HAPPENS. FURTHER,
GSL MIGHT WELL INTERVENE AT SOME POINT IF RANAWEERA GROUP
APPEARS TO BE LOSING, SINCE CONTINUATION OF SITUATION DES-
CRIBED PARA 3 WOULD HAVE SIDE EFFECT OF MUTING IF NOT TOTALLY
SILENCING MOST OUTSPOKEN PRESS CRITIC OF UF GOVERNMENT.
RUSSELL

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a
*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

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**Subject:** POWER STRUGGLE IN TIMES NEWSPAPER GROUP JOINT USIS/ EMBASSY MESSAGE
**TAGS:** PINT, CE, PINT
**To:** NEA
SECSTATE WASHDC
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